

January 5, 2011

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“Growing Agritourism” workshop scheduled in Rio Vista

Farmers, agricultural and tourism professionals, local officials and community leaders will sit down to talk about improving agritourism opportunities in the San Joaquin-Sacramento Delta region at a “Growing Agritourism” workshop coordinated by the University of California Small Farm Program.

Registration and information is now available online, at <http://ucanr.org/2011agtour>. Everyone involved in agritourism is invited. The all-day workshop will be held:

- Feb. 2, 2011, 8:30 a.m. to 4:15 p.m.
Veterans Memorial Building, Rio Vista

Agricultural tourism, or agritourism, allows travelers a chance to visit working farms and ranches for enjoyment and education and can include experiences such as visiting a pumpkin patch, tasting wine, staying at a guest ranch, enjoying a U-pick farm or attending a harvest festival.

“Agritourism supports rural economies and strengthens urban-rural connections,” said Penny Leff, statewide agritourism coordinator for the UC Small Farm Program. “But the challenge is agritourism puts farmers and ranchers in a whole new business — the hospitality business — with a whole new set of skills to learn and a new network of colleagues to work with.”

Findings from a 2009 survey of California agritourism operators confirmed that agritourism can indeed be a profitable venture for farmers and ranchers. But when it came to the topic of permits and regulations, nearly 70 percent of the comments mentioned slow, complicated processes or high fees and regulatory restrictions as major barriers to new operations.

The workshop will address challenges related to permits, regulations, planning, marketing and risk management. The primary goal of the workshops is professional development for people involved in agritourism and building a stronger infrastructure for successful agritourism in the region.

The “Growing Agritourism” workshops will include:

- Presentations from agritourism operators and other regional experts about the benefits, possibilities and challenges of California agritourism
- Resources and tools for marketing, agritourism association development and effective collaboration
- Facilitated discussions among local government staff members, agricultural professionals, tourism professionals and agritourism operators to share perspectives and help build regional networks

The workshop is sponsored by the UC Small Farm Program and UC Cooperative Extension. Major funding to support the workshops is from Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education.

